Army Knowledge Online Provides Information Multiplier

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WASHINGTON (Army News Service) — In a month or so, authorized users will be a mouse click away from accessing the Army's internal Web site.

When established, "Army Knowledge Online," the Army's Intranet, will give active-duty and reserve soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, retirees, and other authorized users a secure, computer-accessed ability to communicate worldwide and obtain access to a storehouse of information, said AKO Program Manager Maj. Charles A. Wells.

Currently undergoing testing, AKO was developed by the Army's Strategic and Advanced Computing Center in the Pentagon, which falls under the Office of the Director for Command, Control, Communications, and Computers.

The concept of AKO was initiated in 1996, said Wells, by then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Dennis J. Reimer.

"AKO began as a communications project up in the General Officer Management Office [in the Pentagon]," said Wells. "General Reimer used it to collaborate with his general officers; they could E-mail each other and conduct online 'chats.'

"The senior Army leadership liked the system so much that they wanted to use it for the whole Army."

The vast majority of AKO content, said Wells, is servicemember-specific, linked to worldwide Army command home pages. Authorized users will be able to log on and electronically "surf" for in-

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formation, such as the quality of life at future duty stations, to include local attractions, cost-of-living and schools. A plethora of other information, such as weather, travel, and Service news would also be available.

"When you see the site, the content will be 'Army content,'" said Wells. "This won't be information we've thought up and put on the system ... we're collecting information to be made available at one location for internal consumption.

"We've had the public Web site, the Army Home Page, which basically tells the Army story to the world, for quite awhile ... AKO is the other side of the coin; it is the Army's 'private' Web site, which provides Army-specific information for the Army."
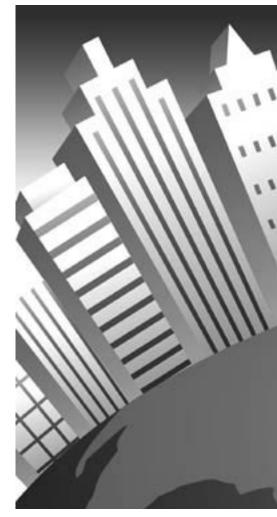
Wells said AKO also includes an internal, computerized, combination address/phone book/"yellow pages" information directory for soldiers and other authorized users.

"One of its features is a 'people search' to locate and contact other soldiers and DA civilians," he said. "You can also search all Web servers in the army.mil domain to look for information and documents," he said. "This is a knowledge-management project, and that knowledge comes from people."

AKO will also enable users to share knowledge quickly via encrypted E-mail accounts, said Wells. In a smaller and much-deployed post-Cold War Army, that ability becomes invaluable.

"Why are we doing this? Well, yesterday we had a very straightforward threat; we knew who the enemy was, and we had a lot of detailed plans to stop an attack

in central Europe. Today we are faced with a variety of challenges ... everything from regional instabilities, economic dangers, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. How are we going to accomplish all of these missions with a much-smaller force?

"The senior Army leadership sees knowledge management as a key tool to accomplish that. We can work more effectively with fewer personnel. As soldiers travel to new jobs around the world, we can have more continuity within the

Army if they share their knowledge with others. We want to capture knowledge from that soldier who has been on the job for 18-24 months and share it with the rest of the Army," he said.

That shared knowledge, however, could be of interest to those who would use it to the Army's disadvantage, such as espionage agents, said Wells. That, he said, is why AKO will be a safeguarded, protected and monitored information conduit.

Contrasted with the current Army Home Page, which is open to the general public through the Internet, Wells said AKO is available only to those with an Army-approved user ID and password.

"In order to get to The Army Portal [for AKO] you have to get an account [consisting of] user ID and password. In order to qualify for that, you have to be working for the Army as an active duty or reserve component soldier, as a DA civilian, a retiree, and some contractors on a case-by-case basis," he said.

There are currently 27,000 registered users for AKO, said Wells, who noted that for the past two years the system has been in limited usage for general officers, other senior leaders, and selected officer year groups using the site for Career Field Designation.

Wells said AKO would expand to 50,000 [users] in Fiscal Year 2000. When The Army Portal debuts in the next few weeks, it will provide additional features such as the ability for users to individually 'tailor' their site by placing preferred topics 'up front' on the page.

"If I decide, in order to help me do my job, that I need to obtain the latest information about Fort Huachuca and Bosnia over a period of time, I can customize my page to always have this information," said Wells.

AKO is "a communication, collaboration, and interaction vehicle," said Lt. Col. W. Addison Woods, the director of the Army's Strategic and Advanced Computing Center in the Pentagon.

"We have a lot of really great web sites and knowledge management efforts around the Army," he said.

"One central [AKO] portal at the headquarters level gives us the capability to harness all of that good work to make it an information multiplier for the Army community." Wells said AKO users would be able to log on at home or at work.

"When I log on at my house, or anywhere in the world, I'll get the same [AKO] page, and it is all protected, using encryption and the user ID and password," he said.

Harnessing the benefits of knowledge management via AKO enhances readiness, said Army Webmaster Christopher Unger.

"We've gotten a lot of benefit by training enroute to a mission; we are now communicating enroute, so when you PCS, you are not 'out of the loop' for that week or so," said Unger. "You can check your Army [AKO] E-mail on your laptop or on a friend's computer.

"To be able to communicate at all times gives the Army a tremendous amount of flexibility. Informational awareness is just as important in the institutional (headquarters) Army as informational dominance is for warfighters on the battlefield," he concluded.

Editor's Note: This information is in the public domain at **http://www.dtic.mil/armylink/news.** For more information about "Army Knowledge Online," visit the public Web site at **http://www.army.mil/ako** or to apply for an AKO account, go to **http://www.us.army.mil** and click on "I'm a new user.")

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